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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Office of Administrative Appeals, MS 2090
Washington, DC 20529-2090



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

PUBLIC COPY

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OCT 27 2010

FILE:



Office: NEBRASKA SERVICE CENTER

Date:

IN RE:

Petitioner:

Beneficiary:



PETITION: Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker as an Other, Unskilled Worker Pursuant
to Section 203(b)(3) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 203 (b)(3)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

SELF-REPRESENTED

INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All of the documents related to this matter have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Please be advised that any further inquiry that you might have concerning your case must be made to that office.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied by us in reaching your decision, or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen. The specific requirements for filing such a request can be found at 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. All motions must be submitted to the office that originally decided your case by filing a Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion. The fee for a Form I-290B is currently \$585, but will increase to \$630 on November 23, 2010. Any appeal or motion filed on or after November 23, 2010 must be filed with the \$630 fee. Please be aware that 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i) requires that any motion must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider or reopen.

Thank you

Perry Rhew

Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The preference visa petition was denied by the Director, Nebraska Service Center, and is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is a roofing business. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a roofer. As required by statute, a Form ETA 750,¹ Application for Alien Employment Certification approved by the Department of Labor (DOL), accompanied the petition. The director concluded that the petitioner had failed to submit initial evidence to establish that the petitioner had the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage, and denied the petition accordingly.

On appeal, the petitioner, submits additional evidence and contends that the director erred in denying the petition.

The AAO conducts appellate review on a *de novo* basis. The AAO's *de novo* authority is well recognized by the federal courts. *See Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004).²

Section 203(b)(3)(A)(iii) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(3)(A)(iii), provides for the granting of preference classification to other qualified immigrants who are capable, at the time of petitioning for classification under this paragraph, of performing unskilled labor, not of a temporary or seasonal nature, for which qualified workers are not available in the United States.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g) (2) states, in pertinent part:

Ability of prospective employer to pay wage. Any petition filed by or for an employment-based immigrant which requires an offer of employment must be accompanied by evidence that the prospective United States employer has the ability to pay the proffered wage. The petitioner must demonstrate this ability at the time the priority date is established and continuing until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence. Evidence of this ability shall be in the form of copies of annual reports, federal tax returns, or audited financial statements.

The petitioner must demonstrate that it has the continuing financial ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date, the day the Form ETA 750 was accepted for processing by

¹ After March 28, 2005, the correct form to apply for labor certification is the ETA Form 9089. *See* 69 Fed. Reg. 77325, 77326 (Dec. 27, 2004).

²The procedural history of this case is documented in the record and is incorporated herein. Further references to the procedural history will only be made as necessary. The submission of additional evidence on appeal is allowed by the instructions to the Form I-290B, which are incorporated into the regulations by the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(a)(1).

any office within DOL's employment system. See 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(d); *Matter of Wing's Tea House*, 16 I&N 158 (Act. Reg. Comm. 1977). Here, the Form ETA 750 was accepted for processing on August 28, 2001.³ The proffered wage is stated as \$10.92 per hour, which amounts to \$22,713.60 per year. Part B of the Form ETA 750, signed by the beneficiary on August 27, 2001, does not indicate that the petitioner has employed the beneficiary.

On Part 5 of the Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker, (Form I-140), filed on December 14, 2007, it is claimed that the petitioner was established on January 1, 1996, employs seven workers, reports gross annual income of \$156,000 and an annual net income of \$116,000.

The petitioner must establish that its job offer to the beneficiary is a realistic one. Because the filing of an ETA 750 labor certification application establishes a priority date for any immigrant petition later based on the ETA 750, the petitioner must establish that the job offer was realistic as of the priority date and that the offer remained realistic for each year thereafter, until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence. The petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage is an essential element in evaluating whether a job offer is realistic. See *Matter of Great Wall*, 16 I&N Dec. 142 (Acting Reg. Comm. 1977); see also 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2). In evaluating whether a job offer is realistic, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) requires the petitioner to demonstrate financial resources sufficient to pay the beneficiary's proffered wages, although the overall circumstances affecting the petitioning business will be considered if the evidence warrants such consideration. See *Matter of Sonegawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (Reg. Comm. 1967).

In support of its ability to pay the proffered wage of [REDACTED] per year, the petitioner failed to provide any evidence with the petition. For this reason, the director denied the petition on January 20, 2009. On appeal, the petitioner has provided no evidence for 2001, 2002, and 2003. For 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007, the petitioner has provided only copies of page 1 of the Form 1120, U.S. Corporation Income Tax Return. USCIS will not accept incomplete copies of tax return as probative of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage in these years. Simply going on record without supporting documentary evidence is not sufficient for purposes of meeting the burden of proof in these proceedings. See *Matter of Treasure Craft of California*, 14 I&N Dec. 190 (Reg. Comm. 1972).

Moreover, none of these returns indicates that the petitioner had sufficient net income to cover the proffered wage of [REDACTED] during the corresponding period. With respect to the figures indicated on page 1 of the returns, the information reflects the following:

³ If the petition is approved, the priority date is also used in conjunction with the Visa Bulletin issued by the Department of State to determine when a beneficiary can apply for adjustment of status or for an immigrant visa abroad. Thus, the importance of reviewing the *bona fides* of a job opportunity as of the priority date, including a prospective U.S. employer's ability to pay the proffered wage is clear.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007
Net Income ⁴	[REDACTED]			

Additionally, besides net income and as an alternative method of reviewing a petitioner's ability to pay a proposed wage, USCIS will examine a petitioner's net current assets. Net current assets are the difference between the petitioner's current assets and current liabilities.⁵ It represents a measure of liquidity during a given period and a possible resource out of which the proffered wage may be paid for that period. In this case, the corporate petitioner's year-end current assets and current liabilities would likely be shown on Schedule L of its federal tax returns if complete copies had been provided. Current assets are shown on line(s) 1 through 6 of Schedule L and current liabilities are shown on line(s) 16 through 18. If a corporation's end-of-year net current assets are equal to or greater than the proffered wage, the corporate petitioner is expected to be able to pay the proffered wage out of those net current assets.⁶ In this case, however, the petitioner has not provided complete copies of its 2004, 2005, 2006 or 2007 tax returns and has not provided any financial documentation for 2001, 2002, or 2003. Therefore, any Schedule L and other information that may be contained in the returns necessary to calculate the petitioner's net current assets are not available for review.

The petitioner has not established its continuing financial ability to pay the proffered wage of [REDACTED] per year. It is noted that if a petitioner establishes by documentary evidence that it employed the beneficiary at a salary equal to or greater than the proffered wage, the evidence

⁴The petitioner is a C corporation. For the purpose of this review of the petitioner's Form 1120 corporate tax returns, the petitioner's net income is found on line 28 (taxable income before net operating loss deduction and special deductions). USCIS uses a corporate petitioner's taxable income before the net operating loss deduction as a basis to evaluate its ability to pay the proffered wage in the year of filing the tax return because it represents the net total after consideration of both the petitioner's total income (including gross profit and gross receipts or sales), as well as the expenses and other deductions taken on line(s) 12 through 27 of page 1 of the corporate tax return. Because corporate petitioners may claim a loss in a year other than the year in which it was incurred as a net operating loss, USCIS examines a petitioner's taxable income before the net operating loss deduction in order to determine whether the petitioner had sufficient taxable income in the year of filing the tax return to pay the proffered wage.

⁵ According to *Barron's Dictionary of Accounting Terms* 117 (3rd ed. 2000), "current assets" consist of items having (in most cases) a life of one year or less, such as cash, marketable securities, inventory and prepaid expenses. "Current liabilities" are obligations payable (in most cases) within one year, such accounts payable, short-term notes payable, and accrued expenses (such as taxes and salaries). *Id.* at 118.

⁶ A petitioner's total assets and total liabilities are not considered in this calculation because they include assets and liabilities that, (in most cases) have a life of more than one year and would also include assets that would not be converted to cash during the ordinary course of business and will not, therefore, become funds available to pay the proffered wage.

will be considered *prima facie* proof of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. To the extent that the petitioner may have paid the beneficiary less than the proffered wage, those amounts will be considered. If the difference between the amount of wages paid and the proffered wage can be covered by the petitioner's net income or net current assets for a given period, then the petitioner's ability to pay the full proffered wage for that period will also be demonstrated. In this matter, the record contains no evidence that the petitioner has employed the beneficiary.

If the petitioner does not establish that it employed and paid the beneficiary an amount at least equal to the proffered wage during a given period, USCIS will next examine the net income figure reflected on the petitioner's federal income tax return, without consideration of depreciation or other expenses. *River Street Donuts, LLC v. Napolitano*, 558 F.3d 111 (1st Cir. 2009); *Taco Especial v. Napolitano*, --- F. Supp. 2d. ---, 2010 WL 956001, at *6 (E.D. Mich. 2010). Reliance on federal income tax returns as a basis for determining a petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage is well established by judicial precedent. *Elatos Restaurant Corp. v. Sava*, 632 F. Supp. 1049, 1054 (S.D.N.Y. 1986) (citing *Tongatapu Woodcraft Hawaii, Ltd. v. Feldman*, 736 F.2d 1305 (9th Cir. 1984)); see also *Chi-Feng Chang v. Thornburgh*, 719 F. Supp. 532 (N.D. Texas 1989); *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc. v. Sava*, 623 F. Supp. 1080 (S.D.N.Y. 1985); *Ubeda v. Palmer*, 539 F. Supp. 647 (N.D. Ill. 1982), *aff'd*, 703 F.2d 571 (7th Cir. 1983). Showing that the petitioner's gross sales and profits exceeded the proffered wage is insufficient. Similarly, showing that the petitioner paid wages in excess of the proffered wage is insufficient.

In *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc. v. Sava*, 623 F. Supp. at 1084, the court held that the Immigration and Naturalization Service, now CIS, had properly relied on the petitioner's net income figure, as stated on the petitioner's corporate income tax returns, rather than the petitioner's gross income. The court specifically rejected the argument that the Service should have considered income before expenses were paid rather than net income. See *Taco Especial v. Napolitano*, --- F. Supp. 2d. at *6 (gross profits overstate an employer's ability to pay because it ignores other necessary expenses).

With respect to depreciation as claimed by counsel, the court in *River Street Donuts* noted:

The AAO recognized that a depreciation deduction is a systematic allocation of the cost of a tangible long-term asset and does not represent a specific cash expenditure during the year claimed. Furthermore, the AAO indicated that the allocation of the depreciation of a long-term asset could be spread out over the years or concentrated into a few depending on the petitioner's choice of accounting and depreciation methods. Nonetheless, the AAO explained that depreciation represents an actual cost of doing business, which could represent either the diminution in value of buildings and equipment or the accumulation of funds necessary to replace perishable equipment and buildings. Accordingly, the AAO stressed that even though

amounts deducted for depreciation do not represent current use of cash, neither does it represent amounts available to pay wages.

We find that the AAO has a rational explanation for its policy of not adding depreciation back to net income. Namely, that the amount spent on a long term tangible asset is a "real" expense.

River Street Donuts at 116. "[USCIS] and judicial precedent support the use of tax returns and the *net income figures* in determining petitioner's ability to pay. Plaintiffs' argument that these figures should be revised by the court by adding back depreciation is without support." *Chi-Feng Chang* at 537 (emphasis added).

The petitioner is obliged to establish its continuing financial ability to pay the proffered wage beginning at the priority date. In this matter, that date is August 28, 2001. As stated above, the petitioner provided no financial documentation for 2001, 2002, or 2003. Therefore, the petitioner has not demonstrated its ability to pay in any of those years.

According to the copy of the partial return provided for 2004, the petitioner reported net income of [REDACTED] which is insufficient to pay the [REDACTED] proffered wage in that year or establish its ability to pay the certified wage.

In 2005, the petitioner's net income of [REDACTED] also could not cover the proffered wage or demonstrate the ability to pay in that year. As no Schedule L for this year (or any other year) was submitted, the petitioner has not demonstrated that its net current assets were sufficient to pay the beneficiary's proposed wage offer.

In 2006, the petitioner's reported net income of [REDACTED] was not sufficient to cover the proffered salary or establish the petitioner's ability to pay during this year.

Finally in 2007, the petitioner's net income of [REDACTED] was still [REDACTED] less than the beneficiary's proposed wage of [REDACTED] and failed to demonstrate the ability to pay in this year.

Matter of Sonogawa, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (BIA 1967), is sometimes applicable where other factors such as the expectations of increasing business and profits overcome evidence of small profits. That case, however relates to petitions filed during uncharacteristically unprofitable or difficult years within a framework of profitable or successful years. During the year in which the petition was filed, the *Sonogawa* petitioner changed business locations, and paid rent on both the old and new locations for five months. There were large moving costs and a period of time when business could not be conducted. The Regional Commissioner determined that the prospects for a resumption of successful operations were well established. He noted that the petitioner was a well-known fashion designer who had been featured in [REDACTED] Her clients included [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] The petitioner had

lectured on fashion design at design and fashion shows throughout the United States and at colleges and universities in [REDACTED]. The Regional Commissioner's determination in *Sonegawa* was based in part on the petitioner's sound business reputation, historical growth and outstanding reputation as a couturiere. In this case, it is noted that none of the petitioner's five tax returns showed sufficient net income or net current assets to cover the proposed wage offer. Further, it may not be concluded that such analogous factual circumstances to *Sonegawa* are present in this case that would overcome the evidence reflected in the tax returns. See *Matter of Obaigbena*, 19 I&N Dec. 533, 534 (BIA 1988); *Matter of Ramirez-Sanchez*, 17 I&N Dec. 503, 506 (BIA 1980). Unlike the *Sonegawa* petitioner, the instant petitioner has not submitted evidence demonstrating that uncharacteristic losses, factors of outstanding reputation or other circumstances that prevailed in *Sonegawa* are present in this matter. The AAO does not conclude that the petitioner has established that it has had the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage.

For the reasons explained above, the petition may not be approved. The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2) requires that a petitioner establish a *continuing* financial ability to pay the proffered wage beginning at the priority date. (Emphasis added.) Upon review of the evidence contained in the record and submitted on appeal, the AAO concludes that the evidence failed to demonstrate that the petitioner has had the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage.

In visa petition proceedings, the burden of proving eligibility for the benefit sought remains entirely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. Here, that burden has not been met.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.